

# Clean Chit to Pigmy Hog Conservation Programme

The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition against Pigmy Hog Conservation Programme and others has been dismissed by the Guwahati High Court on 1st February 1999. In the judgement, the acting Chief Justice Mr. N.C. Jain and the judge Mr. P.G. Agarwal expressed satisfaction at the progress of the project and appreciated the staff for the work done by them to save a highly threatened species from extinction. You may see excerpts of the judgement below.

In 1997, two Guwahati based organisations - the North-East Lady Advocates' Society and Jatiya Swartha Surakhya Parishad - had filed a Public Interest Litigation against the State of Assam, the Union of India and the Pigmy Hog Conservation Programme in the Guwahati High Court. Their writ petition was based on newspaper reports which had alleged that an attempt was made by the project personnel to send samples of hair and blood collected from captive pigmy hogs outside the country for the purpose of cloning and other commercial use. These reports were based on allegations made by a disgruntled staff member, Mr. Manideep Raj. Mr. Raj was asked to resign on disciplinary and professional grounds following his repeated acts of misconduct with the project and Forest Department staff, including the Field Director of the Project Tiger, and irregularities in his field work at Manas National Park. By wilfully twisting the fact that the hair and blood samples were collected only for DNA fingerprinting studies (important for the breeding programme) and by making spurious allegations, he attempted to divert the public attention from the real cause behind his forced resignation. The cloud over the project from these allegations and the PIL has now been cleared by the honorable Guwahati High Court.

The population of captive pigmy hogs has risen by 850% - from 6 to 51 - in three years, and steps to reintroduce them back in the wild are underway. With your support we will certainly succeed in saving this and other threatened species of the tall grasslands from extinction.

Submitted by the Staff Members of the Pigmy Hog Conservation Programme

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In the judgement, the honorable judges referred to the reports of experts submitted by the respondents and the petitioners and expressed that "In view of the above reports of experts we have no hesitation whatsoever to hold that the apprehension of the petitioners are ill-founded and has got no basis. The samples in question could not have been used for the purpose of cloning or genetic patenting" (para 15).

"No case for cancellation of the agreement has been made out. The belated prayer for referring the matter to C.B.I. or a Judicial Commission has also got no basis. The entire exercise was based on mere apprehensions which have been negated by the opinion of the experts as stated above. In the result we find no merit and the writ petition is dismissed without any order as to costs" (para 16).

"From the materials available before us and from the submissions of the parties we have no doubt whatsoever regarding success of the Pigmy Hog Conservation Programme. ... Those who are concerned with the above project namely Dr. Parag Deka, Goutam Narayan, William Oliver and others no doubt deserve a pat on their back for the wonderful work done by them" (para 8).

